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# U.S. to install Contras on 3 Honduras islands

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**ISLA EL TIGRE.** Honduras — The United States will establish bases for Nicaragua's anti-communist rebels on strategically placed Honduran islands close to Nicaragua's Pacific and Caribbean coastlines, according to Honduran officers and U.S. military sources.

The islands are El Tigre, less than a mile from the Honduran mainland and 12 miles from Nicaragua, on the Pacific side, and the two Swan Islands, 135 miles north of Honduras in the Caribbean, about 175 miles from Nicaragua, said the sources, who spoke on condition they not be identified.

The three islands have figured before in controversial covert Central Intelligence Agency operations — El Tigre in the mining of Nicaraguan harbors and the Swans in the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba.

El Tigre is to be used as a supply base and also as a launching point for resistance forces' attacks against troops of the ruling Sandinista government. The Swan Islands will be used as a supply depot for the resistance.

The funding for both operations will come from the \$100 million in aid given recently to the rebels by Congress at the urging of President Reagan, the sources said.

Arthur Skop, a spokesman for the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa, acknowledged that there was already a U.S. base on El Tigre, but said it contained only a "small military element."

He said he could not say what the purpose of the U.S. military presence on the island was, but U.S. and Honduran intelligence officers say that the base is currently being used as a listening post equipped with sensitive electronic equipment to

monitor Sandinista radio traffic and other communications.

Mr. Skop said that a mobile marine radar unit once was installed on El Tigre, which is off-limits to other foreigners, during the Big Pine II joint military exercises conducted by the United States and Honduras in October 1983, but that it was removed in December 1984 and had not been replaced.

El Tigre was used as the main base for the mining of Nicaragua's harbors by the CIA in 1983 and 1984, a move that was condemned by the World Court in The Hague and was the main factor that led Congress to suspend aid to the Contras in October 1984.

The Swan Islands were used by the CIA in 1961 in the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles. The invasion was crushed by

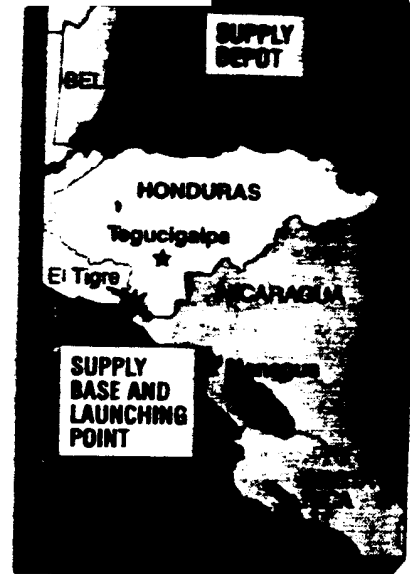
## *The Swan Islands were used by the CIA in the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles.*

Fidel Castro's forces in three days and nearly 1,300 of the invaders were captured and imprisoned.

The ban against foreigners landing on El Tigre was breached last Sunday by two foreign journalists who took their boat to a deserted beach far from the Honduran naval station and walked into Amapala, the island's main town.

There they were told by the mayor, Leo Vallecillo, that reports of the island's new role were the talk of the town.

Mr. Vallecillo said he hoped the re-



ports were not true. "We would fear an attack. We pray to God it wouldn't happen, but if the Sandinistas knew the Contras were here, they might attack us. They could bomb us," he said.

Residents told the two journalists that last July officials from the U.S. base made a rare visit to Amapala to hire local workmen to build a three-mile gravel road linking the U.S. facility with the town and the Amapala Honduran naval base. They said the project lasted about a week.

Mr. Vallecillo said workers were also hired to dig wells and install pipes to the facility, which had previously brought all its food and water in by helicopter.

The base sits on a mountaintop facing the Pacific Ocean and the mouth of the Gulf of Fonseca.

Mr. Vallecillo said the U.S. base officials did not ask his permission to build the road, as is required under Honduran law, and that they paid no taxes on the road, which is also against the law.

"I went to ask them why, and they said, 'This is between the U.S. and Honduran governments,'" he said.

At the U.S. Embassy, Mr. Skop said: "I don't know anything about the road. I don't know who paid for it."

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